



**Alliance for Health Reform Dinner  
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery  
Senator Jay Rockefeller  
September 10, 2014**

Thank you so much for that warm welcome. To the Alliance, thank you for that incredible tribute. I am honored and humbled by it. I also want to thank my wife Sharon and our four children for being here for this evening.

Tonight, I think it is fair to say that a lot people in the room have heard the story of how health care became one of my life passions through my experiences in Emmons, West Virginia. Many of you may have heard me talk about Emmons more than a few times, but that means you also know why Emmons is a touchstone for me.

For that reason I can't resist a mention of it because it is so powerful. And it is powerful because it belongs indelibly to the people of Emmons who in so many ways are the best of America and represent all those who deserve a greater measure of care from all of us.

Emmons speaks to our core human connection and our deeply held aspirations for the greater good. As I look out at all of you, I know everyone in this room has dedicated part of their life and career to public service through health care. You understand me on this. I am privileged to know you and to honor your service, even as you have gathered to recognize my efforts on the Alliance and health care policy.

The health care values I took from Emmons include:

- Universal health care coverage is a right, old school as that may sound. Everyone is deserving and entitled to good affordable health care, especially the most vulnerable among us;
- Good health care is critical to reducing the destructive impact of poverty on individuals, families, and society as a whole;
- Health care is best provided as a public good. Care should not be motivated by profits. Government is the only proven equalizer when it comes to access and affordability.

These simple values have guided me. They have been my moral compass in fighting to make sure everyone has the health care they need to succeed in life.

No issue in my entire career has mattered more to me than health care, because it was fundamental to improving the lives of so many people – obviously, the people of Emmons, of West Virginia, and the nation. It was the work I was meant to do.

Health care policy would become the focus of my Senate career.

Early in my career, I had the good fortune to not only serve on, but Chair, both the Pepper Commission and the Children's Commission, and to learn the inner workings of health care from a master of health policy, the fantastic Judy Feder.

These two Commissions were serious and thoughtful attempts at offering policy solutions to vexing problems. The Members were smart, thoughtful, and committed people. With Pepper, we had dozens of Commission meetings, briefings, and hearings – including a dozen field hearings all across the country -- for nearly two years.

I know we now have a tendency to dismiss Commissions because they fail to deliver results, but I learned there was value in them even though not every recommendation was quickly translated into legislative success. We could find bipartisan solutions to problems. We developed the trust and relationships necessary to get things done when the right time arose.

My experiences on these Commissions formed my vision for the Alliance – to be a driving force to achieve universal health care.

To make that vision a reality, the Alliance needed to be:

- A substantive and thoughtful organization;
- Bipartisan and non-political; and
- An objective and balanced source.

And that is what the Alliance is today. That vision is what attracted Senator Jack Danforth to be my first co-chair and the reason that the Alliance has secured the finest minds in health care policy to its board and staff. I know Ben Cardin and Roy Blunt will act as thoughtful, passionate leaders as they take the mantle of the Alliance.

The Alliance may have been my idea, but it was a labor of love for many of us - most notably Ed, and Tamera, who was there at the inception of the idea and as it flourished.

The Alliance is a lasting legacy to our collective passion for improving people's lives.

The Alliance serves as an extraordinarily unusual entity in the health policy world – it was created expressly to educate and serve as a resource for Members of Congress and their staffs. Health care policy has been in the forefront of public policy debates for 20 years, and the Alliance played a key role in making that happen.

But, when we started, we knew that the majority of Congressman and Senators and their staffs did not have an interest or foundation in health care policy to make good decisions. They had no idea of the enormous challenges we faced in making sure every American had access to health care or more importantly how to begin solving problems.

Not only did we have an inadequately informed political class, the media lacked the ability to cover the issue with the depth and scope that the issue demands.

How did the Alliance become Washington's go to organization for Congress and health policy staff? With passion, dedication, hard work, and an unwavering commitment to our mission – universal health care.

Over the last 20 years, we have spent thousands of hours learning, debating, developing thoughtful and meaningful policy, and helping to solve problems in this marvelous, controversial, rewarding, and life-changing issue called health care.

Every day, Congressional staff are invited to dozens of briefings. They did not have to come to ours, but they did, slowly at first – maybe 20 or 30 people. But, we quickly outgrew our tiny briefing rooms – we even outgrew one of the Senate's largest hearing rooms, Dirksen 106. We had to turn people away, and we still do because we still often have standing room only crowds.

Why do they come? Because our briefings are engaging at every level. C-SPAN covers our meetings because they are so good. We brought in two experts – two on each side of an important health care issue - that staff would generally not have access to speak to. We gave them a chance to hear and engage in some of the most thoughtful and dynamic policy discussions that were directly focused on their jobs. They asked questions via note cards.

Alliance briefings were a safe place to learn, to ask questions, to meet other staff, to get easy to understand materials. As everyone here knows, the Alliance has a reputation for producing first-rate briefing materials. The Alliance allowed staff to build the trust and friendship necessary to get things done.

Why did we focus on staff? To be blunt, we knew that once staff was bought into an issue that there was a much higher likelihood that their Senator or Congressman would become engaged and better informed on health policy. And, once they were engaged, we could achieve our mission. And, it worked.

We also changed the way the press covered health care issues. Demand for the Alliance's press policy briefing materials was intense, even legendary. We are the source for much of the information about health care policy today. In the health care debate, where facts are often lost in the rhetoric of politics, the Alliance still serves a critical role in providing the media with fact checked, unbiased information.

The result of our hard work is that the Alliance is an unqualified success.

So here's the record -- the Alliance has:

- Educated thousands of Congressional staff and officials in the Executive branch;
- Employed over fifty permanent staff—including doctors, lawyers, health policy analysts—and more than 200 interns.
- Educated the media through more than 500 briefings;
- Published countless policy papers; and
- Grew its multimedia platform and presence so that people who are interested in the Alliance's work can access from anywhere at any time.

We now live in a post-Affordable Care Act world. The ACA is the law of the land. It is not going to be repealed. But, the work of health care is not over. Our mission is not fully achieved. The debate over complex and controversial health care policy continues as does the need for education and outreach – maybe more so now than ever.

In the rancor over the Affordable Care Act and its aftermath, I think we have lost sight of why needed to pass comprehensive health reform in the first place. And I worry deeply that we have lost our way in taking shared responsibility for shared societal problems, across political lines and ideologies. The ACA is a law I am fiercely proud of – I have been from day one – even anticipating the likely problems. Why? Because its core purpose was so majestic and it had to work.

Here are just a few concrete ways it has:

- An estimated 13.7 million young adults retained or gained health insurance because they are now allowed to stay on their parents' plans until they are 26 years old.
- In 2014, more than 1.6 million of our nation's seniors coping with high

prescription drug costs received a savings averaging \$819 -- totaling more than \$11.5 billion in savings since 2010. And as the law closes the gap in prescription drug coverage under Medicare, those savings will only continue.

- Thanks to the expansion of the Medicaid program in over 20 states, more than seven million Americans gained health coverage through Medicaid and CHIP.
- The ACA also includes an enormous consumer protection win called the Medical Loss Ratio, or MLR. Because we fought so hard to make this policy part of health reform, we now have an insurance industry that has become more efficient and transparent. We forced insurers to prioritize consumers over shareholders—saving consumers over \$9 billion since 2011 with the medical loss ratio.

And there are many more examples.

Fifty years in public service and thirty years in the Senate has taught me that we need to honor and recognize the successful and national public policies and programs that have made a real difference in the lives of Americans, especially in places like West Virginia that is poorer, older, and sicker than many other places. The government has and will continue to play a role in improving the lives of people. There is no issue where this truer than health care.

Progress requires enormous resilience; and it requires energy, knowledge, and savvy to take advantage when opportunity arises.

It also requires the human connection – the touchstones like Emmons, WV – people and places and the causes that inspire, that hold us in a beautiful unrelenting grip, and drive us to keep at it for as long as it takes to change human lives for the better. And that is my wish – and challenge – for all of you and for this Alliance. Keep at it, for as long as it takes to change human lives for the better – by which I mean universal health care.

This is still, my friends, a war we must fight.

I know you will. I am so grateful to you. For everything. Thank you.